



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH & WELFARE**

JAMES E. RISCH – Governor  
RICHARD M. ARMSTRONG – Director

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR  
450 West State Street, 10<sup>th</sup> Floor  
P.O. Box 83720  
Boise, ID 83720-0036  
PHONE 208-334-5625  
FAX 208-334-5926

**NEWS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
June 13, 2006

Tom Shanahan  
(208) 334-0668

**People Urged to Take Precautions Following Rabid Bat Discovery in Central Idaho**

A rabid bat was found on a farm in Custer County in central Idaho last week, prompting public health officials to warn people throughout the state to take precautions around bats and make sure that their dogs, cats, and horses are adequately vaccinated against rabies.

The rabid bat was discovered on a farm near Challis. Every year, usually in late spring or early summer, rabid bats are reported in Idaho. Last year, 13 rabid bats were confirmed from sites across the state.

Rabies causes a fatal viral illness in humans and other animals. While most bats are harmless and do not carry rabies, they are the only animal in Idaho to naturally carry the virus. In many other states, skunks, raccoons and foxes also frequently carry the virus. Most animals, including household pets, can become exposed to the virus by playing with sick bats that can no longer fly.

“It is extremely important for people to avoid bats or other wild animals that may appear sick or are acting aggressively or abnormally,” says Dr. Leslie Tengelsen, Deputy State Epidemiologist. “People should call their health care provider immediately if they have been bitten or scratched by a bat or other wild animal, unvaccinated pet or pet whose vaccine has expired. Medical therapy administered to people after an animal bite is extremely effective in preventing rabies.”

**(more)**

People usually come in contact with bats through a pet bringing home a sick or dead bat, or by a bat entering their homes through small openings or open windows. People who wake up from sleeping and find a bat in their room may have had an exposure without realizing it; the teeth of a bat are very small and people are sometimes bitten in their sleep without feeling it. The bat should be tested for rabies if there is any question that an exposure might have occurred.

Over the last 20 years, several cats, a skunk, a bobcat and a horse were also identified as infected with the rabies virus in Idaho. All of these infections tested positive for the bat strain of rabies.

To protect yourself and your pets, the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare offers the following tips:

- Do not touch a bat with your bare hands;
- If you have had an encounter with a bat, seek medical attention immediately;
- If you come in contact with a bat, save the bat in a container without touching it and contact your district health department to arrange testing for rabies. Whenever possible, the bat should be tested. This is a free service;
- Always vaccinate your pets, including horses. Pets may encounter bats outdoors or in the home; and
- Bat-proof your home or cabin by plugging all holes in the siding and maintaining tight-fitting screens on windows.

For further information call the District Health Department in your area. Information on rabies can be found at the following website: [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies/](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/rabies/)

###

**(Editors: For more information please contact Health and Welfare's Tom Shanahan, 334-0668, or your District Health Department Public Information Officer.)**